



Literacy Links

December, 2006
Volume 3, Number 4

Monthly E-Newsletter of Maine Reading First

Spotlight on...

Deepening Comprehension

What does it mean to comprehend at a deeper level? Consider two books you have read recently—contrast one you comprehended at a deep level with one where your comprehension was more at a surface or literal level. How would you characterize the extent to which these books influenced your thinking? How do these differences in understanding impact teaching?

In their latest book, Teaching for Deep Comprehension (refer to the June 2006 edition of *Literacy Links* for a summary of this book), Linda Dorn and Carla Soffos (2005) encourage educators to "...move beyond teaching discrete skills to creating problem-solving conditions that will prompt learners to process information at deeper levels," (p. 1). The ultimate goal of reading should be to reach higher levels of thinking while reading by using the strategies of asking questions, building connections, inferring, synthesizing, and/or analyzing the text. Proficient readers use and integrate all of these strategies concurrently while reading. Many students, however, do not intuitively activate or utilize these strategies simultaneously while reading. Therefore, explicit instruction, modeling, and practice which reflects the natural integration of strategies helps students internalize this process.

There is another question to consider when reflecting on instruction which emphasizes deepening comprehension—What are the differences between the terms *comprehension* and *comprehending*? The term *comprehension* reflects an outcome point of view whereas *comprehending* reflects a process point of view. Acknowledging the distinctions between these terms and applying it to instruction impacts teaching. Understanding text is a complex process. Dorn and Soffos (2005) indicate that "when we realize that *comprehending* is the instructional goal of reading, we will teach differently...the problem-solving process is more important than the outcome," (p. 7). Teaching for comprehending rather than comprehension translates into teaching the problem-solving strategies mentioned above and encouraging readers to engage in reflective thinking before, during, and after reading. Such teaching is surrounded by rich conversations between teacher and students and among students. "Reading and writing should float on a sea of talk," (Britton, 1983). Teaching for deep understanding asks readers to move beyond the literal level of the text and co-construct meaning at a higher level.



Upcoming Events

January 16, 2007 ~ Maine Reading Association will host Jennifer Allen, author of Becoming a Literacy Leader: Supporting Learning and Change (Stenhouse, 2006), at their January meeting at the Ground Round in Augusta beginning at 5 p.m. Participants can order dinner off the restaurant's menu at their own expense. Please RSVP to anne.thompson@Schoolunion44.org

Description of Instructional Idea...

Questioning the Author

Questioning the Author (QtA) is a comprehension strategy framework originally developed and published by Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown,

April 25, 2007 ~
1st Annual Nonfiction
Institute, "Using
Nonfiction in the
Classroom", with
award-winning
nonfiction author
Penny Colman. Held
at Jeff's Catering in
Brewer. Sponsored
by the University of
Maine College of
Education and
Human
Development—
Literacy Unit;
Contact Theresa
McMannus at 581-
2441 for registration
information

Save the date!
Those of you who
attended the Maine
Reading First
Summer Institute in
June may be excited
to hear that Jo
Robinson will be
returning to Maine.
A conference with Jo
Robinson on
differentiating
instruction and
implementing
literacy centers will
be held in the
Portland area on May
30 and repeated in
the Bangor area on
June 1. Stay tuned
for more details...

Rebecca Hamilton, and Linda Kucan in 1997. (Refer to the 'Summary of Professional Literacy Text' section for a review of a newly revised professional text on this framework.) The foundation of the QtA framework is building understanding during reading. Readers use queries to push their thinking to higher levels by considering the meaning beyond what's written on the page. In addition to focusing on deepening understanding, *Questioning the Author* encourages readers to interpret, analyze, and evaluate the author's purpose, craft, and organization of the text. Readers consider the fallibility of authors through this framework and the queries are designed to have readers critically analyze the accuracy of the text.

Questioning the Author can be used with any narrative or expository text. The design of QtA moves a traditional text discussion where readers share their own ideas to a more thoughtful level of conversation where readers collaboratively construct meaning of the text. Teacher planning for QtA involves:

1. carefully selecting and previewing the text,
2. segmenting the text into readable sections,
3. identifying the 'big' ideas and potential challenges (pertaining to text clarity, coherence, or density of information), and
4. developing queries.

Some sample QtA queries include:

- What is the author's message? What is the author trying to say?
- Why is the author saying that?
- Does the author explain it clearly?
- How could the author have said it more clearly?
- Given what the author has already written about this character, what do you think the character is up to now?

Summary of Professional Literacy Text...

Improving Comprehension with Questioning the Author: A Fresh and Expanded View of a Powerful Approach

Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown have updated and expanded their original publication with a new release, Questioning the Author: An Approach for Enhancing Student Engagement with Text (1997). This reader-friendly text describes the details of the *Questioning the Author* framework and how to implement it within the classroom. (Refer to the 'Description of Instructional Idea' section for more details on this comprehension framework.) The first section of Improving Comprehension with Questioning the Author covers the fundamentals of queries, planning, and implementing the *Questioning the Author* framework. The second section illustrates *Questioning the Author* in action using 25 classroom scenarios.

Improving Comprehension with Questioning the Author: A Fresh and Expanded View of a Powerful Approach by Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown was published in 2006 by Scholastic, Inc under their "Theory and Practice" series. The ISBN is 0439817307.

Children's Literature Title...

Miss Malarkey Leaves No Reader Behind

Written by Judy Finchler and Kevin O'Malley with illustrations by

Save the Date for Fall 2007~

The New England Reading Association (NERA) Annual Conference is coming back to Maine next year! The 2007 Annual Conference, "Literacy Learning: What Matters" will be held at the Augusta Civic Center on September 27-28. Janet Allen, Penny Kittle, Don Leu, and Doug Hartman will be the keynote presenters for the two-day conference.

"When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young."

Maya Angelou

Kevin O'Malley

This new book joins the previous adventures of Miss Malarkey from the same author team~Miss Malarkey Won't be in Today, Miss Malarkey Doesn't Live in Room 10, and Testing Miss Malarkey. In her latest quest, Miss Malarkey is determined to transform all of her students into avid readers during her school's participation in the 'Everybody Reads in America' program. If the school reads 1,000 books before June, Principal Wiggins has promised to dye his hair purple and sleep on the roof of the school. Can Miss Malarkey captivate her students with the joy of reading before June? Both students and teachers will be inspired by how Miss Malarkey tuned into students' interests and sparked their motivation to read.

Miss Malarkey Leaves No Reader Behind was published in 2006 by Walker and Company and the ISBN is 0802780849.

News from Maine Reading First...

- The Maine Department of Education will not be holding a Maine Reading First subgrant competition this school year. Questions related to this can be directed to Patrick O'Shea at Patrick.O'Shea@maine.gov or Lee Anne Larsen at LeeAnn.Larsen@maine.gov

Check it out...

KidZone is a website full of resources for teachers and students. The materials on this website can be accessed by grade level or theme. It includes multiple activity ideas and reproducibles for reading and writing, including letter recognition, high-frequency words, and create-your-own handwriting tracer sheets. The website address is <http://www.kidzone.ws>

Newsletter Archives

There are several earlier editions of *Literacy Links* available at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

| Edition | Spotlight Topic |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| March, 2005 | Maine Reading First |
| April, 2005 | Maine Reading First Course |
| May, 2005 | Reading Fluency |
| June, 2005 | Vocabulary |
| September, 2005 | Phonemic Awareness |
| October, 2005 | Phonics |
| November, 2005 | Comprehension |
| December, 2005/January, 2006 | DIBELS |
| February, 2006 | Literacy Centers |
| March, 2006 | Interactive Read Aloud |
| April, 2006 | Nonfiction |
| May, 2006 | Word Walls |
| June, 2006 | Classroom Design |
| September, 2006 | Shared Reading |
| October, 2006 | Automaticity |
| November, 2006 | Using Assessment to Guide Instruction |

For additional information about any of the items in this newsletter or to sign up to receive this e-newsletter, please email janet.trembly@maine.gov



Click here to view the Maine Reading First website
<http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

The professional development opportunities and materials are listed in *Literacy Links* for informational purposes only and are not necessarily endorsed by the Maine Department of Education's Maine Reading First Initiative.